

# LIVING AND WORKING IN THE WHITE HOUSE



Every president since John Adams has left his personal mark on the White House. Some have redecorated rooms or acquired important paintings and sculptures; others have planted trees and shrubs or otherwise modified the landscape. Harry Truman added a balcony. Dwight Eisenhower installed a putting green. The Kennedy children had a stable for their ponies, and Amy Carter built a tree house in a spreading Atlas cedar. Each addition in its own way was an attempt to make the White House less like a museum and more like a home.

As a home, the White House has a number of shortcomings. Within its relentless formality, no indoor recreation space exists where members of the first family can relax at the end of a hectic day. Nor does the house have sufficient storage space to accommodate its innumerable state functions. Imagine hosting four or five diplomatic receptions a week, and each time having to hire a moving company to transport the tables, chairs and stages to the house, set them up, then take them back to a warehouse until the next event. That's the way things work at the White House, and it is confused and costly. Closets, corridors and driveways overflow with furniture and equipment, as though the staff were having a tag sale. No modern hotel would put up with such chaos, yet the White House has been doing it for years because it has no choice.

For these reasons, the *Comprehensive Design Plan* is recommending modest changes within the White House, mainly the addition of indoor recreation space to make the house more livable. This new area, a combination den, gym and entertainment space, might be located in renovated space inside or underground, to the north of the executive residence.

The convoys of trucks and vans that regularly jam the White House grounds would be redirected to loading docks beneath the New Executive Office Building, with deliveries to the White House

and adjacent buildings by small vehicles similar to golf carts. Additional storage space beneath Pennsylvania Avenue would relieve the pressure of the nonstop special events – from state dinners to Easter egg rolls – that comprise daily life at the White House. Greater efficiency would translate into substantial savings over time.

But the White House is also the quintessential home/office, with a large presidential apartment upstairs over the national shop. Like the residence, the business side of the White House needs to catch up with the late 20th century. The main problems are a shortage of meeting space, inadequate facilities for the White House press corps – now numbering in the thousands – and the glut of cars, trucks and delivery vans that take over President’s Park.

The *Comprehensive Design Plan* recommends additional meeting rooms for the White House staff beneath West Executive Avenue. This new space would reduce the use of historic rooms in neighboring buildings, which are typically small, technologically inadequate and acoustically inferior. The U.S. Capitol recently solved its space problems in a similar way.

The news media would continue to occupy the first floor of the west colonnade, as well as a new facility beneath the adjacent West Wing Drive containing the presidential briefing room, interview rooms and additional space for television crews, photographers and White House correspondents. For the first time, space for visiting journalists would be available as well.

To reclaim President’s Park from the automobile, the plan proposes two dramatic additions: a two-story, 290-car parking garage beneath Pennsylvania Avenue, and an 850-car garage under the Ellipse. The first would be for presidential motorcades, visiting dignitaries and senior White House staff, the second for staff during the week and possibly the public on weekends and holidays.



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Existing Conditions –  
The new plan will  
reconnect the pieces of  
President's Park.

